

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 2-2

WASHINGTON TIMES
15 October 1985

New nuclear-powered cruiser may toughen Moscow's Pacific fleet

By Timothy Elder
THE WASHINGTON TIMES FOREIGN SERVICE

TOKYO — In a new projection of Soviet power, Moscow's Pacific fleet may be about to receive the first of a new class of nuclear-powered missile cruisers.

Admiral James A. Lyons, commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, has told a group of Japanese reporters that a Soviet task force led by the nuclear-powered cruiser Frunze, a 28,000-ton Kirov-class vessel that can carry up to 250 missiles, recently rounded the southern tip of Africa from the Atlantic Ocean and entered the Indian Ocean.

"We believe [the Frunze] will eventually join the Soviet Pacific fleet," Adm. Lyons said.

The Navy official's comments came in a briefing for the reporters last week. A transcript of his remarks later was made available to U.S. journalists. Adm. Lyons, who assumed command of the Pacific fleet last month, was in Japan as a part of a series of visits to U.S. and allied naval facilities in the Pacific area.

The new cruiser, which was anchored at South Yemen's Socotra Island last week, may make a number of "show the flag visits" along the way before eventually joining Soviet naval forces in the west Pacific, the admiral said.

The Soviet vessel was following a pattern common to ships being deployed to the Pacific fleet, he said.

"This is significant and will raise the capabilities of the Soviet Pacific fleet," he said.

Armaments carried by cruisers such as the Frunze include 20 SS-19 nuclear missiles. These missiles travel at over twice the speed of sound and can strike targets up to 400 miles away, according to Western intelligence sources.

The cruiser is accompanied by two guided missile destroyers that also would be the first of these types deployed in the Pacific, Adm. Lyons said.

The 8,500-ton Udaloy-class destroyer and the 7,900-ton Osmotritielanny-class destroyer also may become a permanent part of the Soviet fleet in the Pacific, the admiral said.

"It's a manifestation of the sustained buildup of the Soviet fleet in the Pacific," the admiral said. The Soviet Pacific fleet is based in Vladivostok, located on the Sea of Japan coast. In numbers of vessels, the fleet has grown in recent years to become the largest fleet in the Soviet navy, according to Western defense officials.

Japanese have expressed growing concern over the Soviet buildup. Japanese Socialist Party official Hiroyuki Maruyama, writing in the current issue of a major monthly opinion magazine, warned that Japan "must avoid a situation where the Soviet navy obtains unilateral sea control." These remarks appeared in the November issue of "Shokun."

In another development, Adm. Lyons said Soviet military aircraft flying between the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea now pass regularly over North Korea. U.S. and South Korean air force planes have been scrambling to intercept these flights, he said.

The overflights were first reported in August. Until then, all Soviet aircraft flying along the Asian coast passed through the Korea Strait between Japan and South Korea.

North Korea may have provided the new air route to the Soviet Union as part of an agreement that enabled Pyongyang to obtain new MiG-23s, the analysts said.